

Black Caucus Launches Talbert Leadership Institute

By Pamela Crosby

NASHVILLE, TN—Earlier this month Black Methodists for Church Renewal, Inc., (BMCR) launched a new leadership institute designed to engage young leaders—laity and clergy. Known and highly regarded for his gifts of leadership and bold witness, Bishop Melvin George Talbert's name is given to the institute. Talbert has led The United Methodist Church in creative leadership and bold witness as mentor, pastor, conference staff member, district superintendent, general secretary and bishop.

An elegant luncheon at the Nashville Airport Marriott Hotel launched the institute and celebrated Talbert's 75th birthday and 49th year of ordination. James H. Salley, Vice Chancellor of Africa University, hosted the gathering of nearly 200, which included family members, Episcopal colleagues, general agency staff, caucus members, church leaders, and many friends. More than 700 people responded to invitations to this event with congratulations and financial contributions; among responses were congratulatory letters from President Barack Obama and former President Bill Clinton.

Mrs. Marilyn Magee Talbert, honorary chairperson, spoke of her husband's unwavering commitment to youth and young adults and to peace and justice.

The institute, conceived and authorized by the National BMCR Board of Directors at its 2008 annual meeting, will engage young lay and clergy to enhance their leadership and administrative potential through knowledge and praxis in scholarship, interpersonal relations, skill development, strategic thinking and planning, using an "incubator approach."

Former BMCR Chairperson Cheryl Walker said the institute will foster greater awareness of United Methodism and the distinctiveness of our Wesleyan heritage by "collaborating through and with United Methodist seminaries and universities/colleges, with historically UM Black colleges, and other partnering with agencies of our church."

During his long and illustrious ministerial career, Talbert has served in many leadership roles in the denomination. In 1973 he was the first black elected general secretary of the General Board of Discipleship. He has served as a

member of the General Council on Ministries (1976-84), a member of the General Commission on Religion and Race (1980-88), and was president of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA (1996-97).

Talbert is known for his prophetic stands for inclusiveness and justice and for being an outspoken advocate for the oppressed, the marginalized and for peace. He has fought long and hard to help The United Methodist Church and society address racism. He is committed to racial, gender and sexual orientation inclusiveness, believing there is room at God's table for everyone.

He has led or been involved in ecumenical delegations to Africa, Armenia, China, Cuba, Cyprus, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, North Korea, South Korea, Palestine and Russia. In 1991, Talbert was one of 18 religious leaders who visited the Middle East in an attempt to avert the Gulf War. In 2003, he was one of 13 leaders who went to Iraq, trying to avoid unilateral US military action against that country.

Recently named Dean of the Bishop Melvin George Talbert Leadership Institute, Bishop Alfred Johnson told the audience and Bishop Talbert, "I enthusiastically look forward to being a part of a cast of players who will design a new drama that extends the good work God has done in you, Bishop Talbert, and in a leadership development process that reflects your witness in being bold, filled with passion and compassion, and with an unquestionably competent, effective and transformational model of ministry."

A design team, led by Johnson, will develop strategies, encourage bold witness and oversee the development of the institute. The proceeds from the launch brought sufficient funds to begin the development plans. For updates on the Talbert Leadership Institute and other BMCR programs, visit www.bmcrumc.org

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